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THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Security Council expresses deep concern over looting and burning by HVO forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina; demands end to all such actions.

* General Assembly deplores Israeli policies and practices which violate human rights of Palestinian and other Arabs in occupied territories.

* Secretary-General prepares United Nations transition plan for Bosnia-Herzegovina.

* In former Yugoslavia, UNHCR reports increase in movement of people throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina.

* In Iraq, two UN guards are killed and one seriously injured.

* Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee approves draft aimed at improving situation of rural women.

* In Angola, UNITA, says it will stop quartering of its troops as called for under Lusaka Peace Agreements.

* WHO is to head new expanded programme for eliminating river blindness from Africa.

* Secretary-General expresses regret at decision of United States to withdraw from UNIDO.

* UNDP and several Northeast Asian governments sign development agreements.

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The Security Council has expressed its deep concern over the looting and burning of houses by the HVO forces in the area of Mrkonjic Grad and Sipovo, which have continued for some time. In a presidential statement Thursday evening, the Council noted with concern that similar acts had been committed by Bosnian Serb forces in other areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Council was also deeply concerned by reports that the HVO was moving mine laying equipment into the Mrkonjic Grad and Sipovo areas.

(more)

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Council President for the month of December, Sergey Lavrov of the Russian Federation said in the statement that the Council considered such actions to be dangerous and detrimental to the spirit of confidence essential for the implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Security Council demanded that all such actions be stopped immediately and stressed the need for all parties to exercise maximum restraint and to demonstrate the cooperation essential for the successful implementation of the Peace Agreement.

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The General Assembly has deplored Israeli policies and practices which violate the human rights of the Palestinian and other Arabs in the occupied territories and expressed the hope that, in light of recent positive political developments, those violations would end immediately. The Assembly took that action by adopting a number of resolutions on Israeli practices.

In one resolution adopted by a vote of 144 in favour to 2 against (Israel, United States) with 7 abstentions, the Assembly also noted with satisfaction the return of a number of deportees to the occupied territories and called on Israel to facilitate the return of the rest and accelerate the release of all remaining Palestinians arbitrarily detained or imprisoned.

By a recorded vote of 147 in favour and 2 against (Israel, United States) with 4 abstentions, the Assembly demanded that Israel accept the de jure applicability of the 1949 Geneva Convention to the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem and other territories it had occupied since 1967, and comply with its provisions.

The Assembly commended the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices for its impartiality, asked it to continue its work and demanded that Israel cooperate with the Committee. It took that action by adopting a resolution by a vote of 69 in favour to 2 against with 80 abstentions.

In another action, the Assembly called on Israel to "rescind forthwith" its decision to impose laws, jurisdiction and administration on the occupied Syrian Golan and, by a recorded vote of 139 in favour to 1 against (Israel), with 13 abstentions, it also called on Israel to desist from changing its physical character, demographic composition, institutional structure and legal status.

Including these, the Assembly also acted on 25 draft resolutions and 5 draft decisions as recommended by its Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization). In addition to Israeli practices, it took action on reports on decolonization, atomic radiation, international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space and peace-keeping operations.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali met with his senior aides in Geneva today to draw up a United Nations plan for the transfer from United Nations peace-keepers in Bosnia- Herzegovina and in most of Croatia to an international implementation force that would be fielded and commanded by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

The Secretary-General is expected to present the United Nations plan at the Peace Implementation Conference in London on Friday and Saturday that will discuss the transition according to the terms of the peace agreement negotiated in Dayton, Ohio, between the Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian governments.

Speaking to journalists at the United Nations Office in Geneva today, Mr. Boutros-Ghali said the United Nations never pretended to have a monopoly on the peaceful solution of the international dispute. He said the United Nations welcomed any group of countries or any regional organizations which could solve this problem. The Secretary-General had sent a letter to the Security Council, earlier this year, saying that for financial reasons, the United Nations could not continue its presence in the former Yugoslavia. He had proposed a multinational force.

The Secretary-General said the London Conference was expected to dissolve the machinery of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia set up jointly between the United Nations and the European Union to work for peace in the former Yugoslavia. But the United Nations would have continuing responsibilities in the areas of humanitarian action, particularly the return of refugees and the displaced people, the deployment of an international civilian police force and the protection of human rights.

The Special Representative for the former Yugoslavia and for NATO, Kofi Annan, and the commander of United Nations Peace Forces in the former Yugoslavia General Bernard Janvier would oversee the military transition, the Secretary-General said. The United Nations Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata, would be in charge of humanitarian action. The UN Department of Peace Keeping Operations would deploy the international civilian police force and the human rights responsibilities in the former Yugoslavia would be shared by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Jose Ayala Lasso, the United Nations Center for Human Rights, the UN Special Rapporteur for the former Yugoslavia, Elizabeth Rein and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

The Secretary-General also said that he would nominate a high UN official to coordinate between the different UN bodies operating in Bosnia as well as with the international implementation force that will be deploying soon.

Mr. Boutros-Ghali, who had just ended a 10-day tour of five western African countries said that he was also discussing the situation in Rwanda with his aides. The mandate of the UN peace keeping mission in Rwanda, UNAMIR, is due to end on December 8th.

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In the former Yugoslavia, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, (UNHCR) has reported that there had been an increase in the movement of people in different areas of Bosnia. A UNHCR spokesman said this appeared to be all connected with areas of the country which were due to be handed over to one side or the other as a result of the Dayton Agreement. There had been reported movement of 1,500 Croats from Sipovo. UNHCR had confirmed that some of these people had already reached Croat-held territory in Western Bosnia.

Meanwhile, the cease-fire in Bosnia-Herzegovina seemed to be holding well along the entire confrontation line. There had been some very heavy snow falls; however the Sarajevo airport and the "blue routes" remained open. United Nations engineers continued to work with local engineers and had completed repairs on electricity lines, reducing the number of electrical failures and stabilizing the flow into the city of Sarajevo.

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Two United Nations guards have been killed and one seriously injured in Iraq, according to a United Nations spokesman. He said the tragedy occurred today, as the guards were driving past a local gas station when one of the four fuel tanks located at the site exploded. The spokesman said the incident was being investigated and there was no conclusive result yet. Those who died in the accident were from Poland and the Philippines and the third guard who was injured, was from Nepal.

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has expressed his condolences to the families of the two guards. The United Nations has a total of 152 guards from seven countries serving in Iraq. They are from the Czech Republic, Denmark, Bangladesh, Greece, Poland, the Philippines and Nepal.

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The Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee has called on the General Assembly to request the international community to promote the realization of the programme and projects aimed at the improvement of the situation of rural women. This would be within the overall framework of an integrated follow-up to relevant global conferences.

Also by the draft, the World Food Summit, to be held in 1996, would be invited to give due consideration to the improvement of the situation of women

in rural areas, taking into account their role in food production and food security. In addition, the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (HABITAT II), would be invited to consider the gender aspects of rural-urban migration and its impact on the situation of rural women, in formulating relevant strategies and actions.

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In Angola, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), has said it would stop the quartering of its troops. It cited, what it said were recent attacks by Government soldiers against positions under its control in several provinces. UNITA had also accused some members of the United Nations Blue Helmets of sexual violations.

A United Nations spokesman in Luanda said UNITA's statement came just one day after a session of the Joint Commission, which strongly condemned the government incursions in UNITA-controlled areas and had decided to send a high-level delegation headed by the United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM III) Force Commander General Philip Sibanda accompanied by representatives from both the Government and UNITA. The Commission also demanded an investigation into the accusations of sexual violations. During a press conference which followed the meeting of the Joint Commission, Alioune Blandon Beye, Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations in Angola, pointed out that the time had come for all parties to contribute to a new impetus to push the Angolan peace process forward.

UNITA was also seeking an explanation from the United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM III) for what it says were sexual violations committed by elements of the Blue helmets in regions under UNITA's control, the spokesman said. It is also calling for a re-evaluation of the implementation of the Lusaka Protocol.

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The World Health Organization (WHO) is now set to lead a new programme which aims to control and eventually eliminate river blindness as a public health hazard from the entire African continent. The new initiative, the African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control would become operational in January 1996. The programme would directly benefit more than 15 million people who were infected with the disease in 16 participating African countries. In all, nearly 100 million people living in those countries were estimated to be at risk from the disease.

As the executing agency, WHO would provide overall technical guidance and coordination, working in close cooperation with the World Bank, participating governments, bilateral donors and non-governmental development organizations.

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The Secretary-General has taken note with regret of the decision of the United States to withdraw from the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) effective 31 December 1996. In a statement issued through his spokesperson in Europe, the Secretary-General said that universality was one of the main strengths of the agencies of the United Nations system. He expressed the hope that UNIDO would be able to adjust its work programme in order to account for this new situation.

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Following three years of quiet diplomacy between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the governments of the People's Republic of China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation, key senior officials of these countries have signed three agreements to develop the Tugmen River Economic Development Area.

The agreements will establish the first inter-governmental organization for development in Northeast Asia. UNDP Administrator, James Gustave Speth, who hosted the historic signing, said he wanted the project to be a model of people-centred, environmentally sustainable development, with benefits to the poor and jobless in the region, which has 150 million people.

UNDP contributed over $4 million to the initial phase of the Project.

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